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SUBJECT: 1ST VP SAYS PEACE WITH FNL CRITICAL FIRST STEP

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following a request from Ambassador Moller for a meeting, First Vice-President Dr. Yves Sahinguvu told the Ambassador on May 8th that:
-- the Government of Tanzania (GOT) is the key to solving the PALIPEHUTU-FNL (FNL) problem;
-- the Government of Burundi (GOB) is ready to grant constitutionally permissible governmental positions to the FNL;
-- the numerous splits among political parties in the National Assembly means that additional, cumbersome negotiations are required to overcome the stalemate; and
-- while all parties are positioning themselves for 2010 elections, peace with the FNL is the critical first step to assuring a successful 2010 election.
This meeting is one in a series of discussions with political leaders addressing the tensions exacerbated by the recent FNL armed attacks and the stalemate in the National Assembly that has effectively blocked legislative progress. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Sahinguvu told the Ambassador that the Government of Tanzania holds the key to resolving the FNL problem, as the GOT harbors and finances the FNL leadership in Dar es Salaam. According to Sahinguvu, the only way that the FNL will be forced to act will be if the GOT pressures the FNL leadership to return to Bujumbura or face reduced support in Dar. However, he said there is political gamesmanship at play between the South African Government and the GOT, and it would be unfortunate if progress in the peace process was limited by external politics. Sahinguvu speculated that the FNL conducted its April 17 (reftel) attack on Bujumbura in an effort to rally unhappy demobilized soldiers against the current administration. However, the GOB remains open to the idea of granting certain government positions to the FNL through the negotiating process.

¶3. (SBU) The current stalemate in the National Assembly is a result of the competing interests among different parties, according to the First Vice President. Sahinguvu said that it is indeed possible for the ruling National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Front for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) to re-establish a majority if they negotiate and ally themselves with other political parties. However, he cautioned that the increasing number of divisions within various political parties is making it extremely difficult to negotiate, as each splinter group demands significant attention. Sahinguvu was adamant however that the Constitution not be changed to accommodate these cases as it is based on the comprehensive framework for Burundi's future established in the 2000 Arusha Accords.

¶4. (SBU) Sahinguvu acknowledged that politicians and others are already engaged in preparing for 2010 elections, and

expressed confidence that Burundi would host successful elections if peace with the FNL is achieved, an independent electoral commission is established, and all parties agree on an election procedure. However, Sahinguvu reiterated that the most critical component to successful elections is peace with the FNL.

MOLLER